Imaginative geography as a travelling concept: Foucault, Said and the spatial turn

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IMAGINATIVE GEOGRAPHY AS A TRAVELLING CONCEPT

Foucault, Said and the spatial turn

In his 1982 essay on 'Traveling Theory', Edward Said argues that the transfer of ideas in the humanities and the social sciences is influenced by both 'conditions of acceptance' and 'resistances'. The journey of theories, he explains, is never unimpeded. Following this observation, the present study wishes to explore further the factors determining the itinerary of theories. It puts forward the thesis that the interdisciplinary reception of theory is a selective – and historically variable – process, depending on the receiving discipline's dominant paradigm, which directs the researchers' attention to those aspects of the received theory that can best be adapted to their present purpose. In the process, individual concepts are isolated from their original context and reintegrated into a new theoretical and disciplinary environment. My example of this is the divergent use of Michel Foucault and Edward Said in the contexts of the respective linguistic and spatial turns, firstly as pioneers of discourse analysis and secondly as precursors of spatial thinking. As the current interest in Foucault and Said as explorers of 'imaginative geographies' shows, each turn emphasizes other concepts of a travelling theory, leading to highly productive – though always partial – (mis-)readings.

Keywords spatial turn; linguistic turn; travelling concepts; 'imaginative geography'; Orientalism; cultural boundaries; spatialization of thought; spatialization of difference

I

In an issue dedicated to travelling concepts, it is perhaps appropriate to recall that the very concept of 'travelling concepts' is itself a travelling one. Exactly 20 years before Mieke Bal observed that concepts move 'between disciplines, between individual scholars, between historical periods, and between geographically dispersed academic communities' (Bal, 2002: 24), Edward Said introduced the metaphor of the voyage to describe the transfer of theories within the humanities and the social sciences (Said, 1983).[1] Theories, Said argued, journey both in space and in time – and they are marked by each place and by each historical constellation through which they travel. En route, they are continually shaped and reshaped according to the local conditions of production, reception, transmission, and – not least – resistance. Not all aspects of

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a travelling theory survive the journey; some are abandoned, replaced and forgotten along the way. Consequently, Said adds,

> one should go on to specify the kinds of movement that are possible, in order to ask whether by virtue of having moved from one place and time to another an idea or a theory gains or loses in strength, and whether a theory in one historical period and national culture becomes altogether different for another period or situation.
>
> (Said, 1983: 226)

Theories, in short, are not stable, located as it were in a fixed place, but they are part of the general dynamics of history. To trace their development means to map both their route from one historical site to another, as well as to chart the transformations which occur at these various locations.[2]

Ironically, the reception history of Said's essay itself provides an illustration of the transformative process that the concept of 'travelling theory' attempts to capture. The concept was taken up by, amongst others, the anthropologist James Clifford in his contribution to the *Inscriptions* volume on *Traveling Theories, Traveling Theorists* in 1989. One year later, Clifford borrowed and adapted the travel metaphor for his essay on 'Traveling Cultures' (Clifford, 1997).[3] In a time in which our image of the world is dominated by the topos of the ever-increasing mobility of information, goods and people, it is not difficult to see why the travel metaphor should have a strong appeal to members of the Western academia, who are privileged travellers themselves: 'Theory nowadays takes the plane', Clifford comments, 'sometimes with round-trip tickets' (Clifford, 1989: Unpaginated). Just as 'travelling theorists' move within a clearly delimited space, however, so do 'travelling theories', whose journeys are frequently confined to those parts of the academic world that partake in English-language research. All the more surprising is the fact that Said – one of the founding figures of postcolonial studies – uses the travel metaphor rather uncritically. As Clifford reminds us, the metaphor has limitations that should not be overlooked. However, despite the word's 'connotations of middle class ''literary'', or recreational, journeying, spatial practices long associated with male experiences and virtues', Clifford decides to hold on to the metaphor himself because it conveys a 'sense of worldly, ''mapped'' movement' that alternative terms lack (Clifford, 1989: Unpaginated).[4]

Even if Mieke Bal's 2002 study *Travelling Concepts* does not mention Said's essay by name, it also appears to be a continuation of the project initiated there; although this is not to disregard the crucial differences between the two approaches. As Bal's title indicates, she explicitly focuses on individual concepts – which she understands as 'theories in miniature' (Bal, 2006: 157)[5] – rather than whole (macro-)theories, and this shift in focus has important implications. Because a single concept can be isolated from its original theoretical environment and it can then be reintegrated into a new context, it travels better than whole bodies of interconnected concepts. It has a higher degree of flexibility, since each individual concept may become part of more than one theory, constituting a transdisciplinary contact zone. Bal is interested precisely in this interdisciplinary potential of travelling concepts – their power of transcending boundaries – whereas Said highlights the time- and place-specific factors that make a full transfer of theories impossible. For Said, a theory's 'movement into a new

environment is never unimpeded', which is why 'resistances' are as relevant for an investigation of travelling theories as the 'conditions of acceptance' governing the transfer (Said, 1983: 226–227). Unfortunately, however, Said does not examine in any further detail how these conditions are established, nor does he note which other factors, apart from resistances, play a part in the process.

Focusing on these two questions, the present essay seeks to explore further the complex dynamics of reception and rejection that characterizes the transfer of theory. The interdisciplinary translation of theories, this study suggests, is a highly selective process determined not only by conscious resistances but also by what may be termed 'blind spots'. Because the receiving discipline's dominant paradigm directs the researchers' attention to those aspects of the received theory that seem most immediately suitable to their purposes, the transfer remains necessarily partial: Only certain concepts are adopted, while others are ignored. Whenever the emphasis shifts from one dominant paradigm to another, the perspective on the received theory changes; concepts that were previously unnoticed or marginalized move to the centre of attention and the transfer begins anew, producing a different result. In this sense, theories never cease to travel – although they rarely ever travel in their entirety.

One example of such repeated but partial reception is the (re-)interpretation of the works of Michel Foucault and Edward Said in the context of the so-called linguistic and spatial turns. For both turns, Said's seminal study *Orientalism* (first published in 1978) represents 'a pioneering attempt to use Foucault systematically in an extended cultural analysis' (Clifford, 1988: 264), but on different grounds. Mid-1980s to early-1990s responses to *Orientalism* (especially in the field of postcolonial studies which was emerging at this time) tended to read Said's book as a Foucauldian analysis of the nexus between language and power. In more recent criticism, by contrast, the main emphasis is increasingly placed on the study's spatial categories derived from *Madness and Civilization* and other works by Foucault. Human geographers in particular have argued for a reassessment of Foucault and Said as groundbreaking spatial thinkers. As a consequence, while *Orientalism* continues to be a rich source for travelling concepts, the focus is currently shifting from the concept of 'discourse' to that of 'imaginative geography'.

In order to appreciate this shift, it is necessary to first have a closer look at the nature of turns in general and at that of the spatial turn in particular; this shall be done in the following two sections. The last section of my study will reconstruct the itinerary of 'imaginative geography' from the works of Foucault, through Said's *Orientalism*, to the writings of two principal proponents of the spatial turn, Edward Soja and Derek Gregory.

II

It has become common practice within the humanities and the social sciences to represent the history of the disciplines concerned as an increasingly rapid succession of methodological and conceptual breaks rather than a continuous evolution. This development can be traced with some precision to the 1960s, the decade that saw the publication of Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966), and Richard

Rorty's *The Linguistic Turn: Essays in Philosophical Method* (1967). All three books helped forge what can be described as a 'turn towards turns', albeit in different ways. Whereas Kuhn and Foucault prepared the ground for the now current conceptualization of the history of knowledge as a series of independent paradigms marked by epistemological breaks, the volume edited by Richard Rorty first identified such a break within contemporary philosophy. In the 40 years since the publication of *The Linguistic Turn*, the concept of the 'turn' has proved to be more persistent than Foucault's 'episteme' and even Kuhn's 'paradigm' (although 'turn' is sometimes employed interchangeably with 'paradigm shift'). Thus when sociologist David Chaney declared a *cultural turn* in his eponymous monograph (Chaney, 1994) – using a phrase that would reappear, with slightly different meanings, in other books of that decade[6] – he harked back to Rorty's title, as have many other authors in more recent years. In a 2006 study, German cultural theorist Doris Bachmann-Medick enumerates no fewer than seven turns proclaimed after (and in the wake of) the linguistic turn, including the 'performative', the 'postcolonial', and the 'iconic turn', only to conclude that the near future will add many more 'turns' to the list (Bachmann-Medick, 2006).

The fact that physicist and philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn explicitly restricted his theory of 'scientific revolutions' to the natural sciences has obviously not detained scholars from other fields from adapting the notion of 'paradigm shift' to their own disciplines. While there can be no doubt that the concept of 'paradigm' is much travelled, it is less certain whether it has travelled *well*: In the course of its journey, it has been invested with so many new and often conflicting meanings that it seems to have lost its original terminological function. In a late interview, Kuhn generously took all the blame for the current confusion surrounding the term – declaring that '*[p]aradigm* was a perfectly good word, until I messed it up' (Kuhn, 2000: 298; emphasis in original) – despite the fact that his 1969 postscript to *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* had done much to clarify the matter. Here, Kuhn distinguishes two main uses of the word, one broader, the other more specific. In its first meaning, 'paradigm' refers to 'the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given [scientific] community' (something that Kuhn also calls the 'disciplinary matrix'), whereas in its second (narrower) meaning, 'it denotes one sort of element in that constellation', namely 'concrete puzzle-solutions' (Kuhn, 1996: 175). It is this second use of the term that is most relevant in the present context. According to Kuhn, a paradigm (in the sense of 'exemplar', or 'shared example') allows scholars to derive ever new explanations from an already established model of puzzle-solution without having to recourse to 'explicit rules' (Kuhn, 1996: 175, 187–91). The exemplar serves as both a specific model and a general point of orientation. It constitutes an epistemological lens that determines how the members of the corresponding scientific community look at, structure and explain a phenomenon or problem (or constellation thereof) – until a revolution occurs and the paradigm is substituted by another.

Of course, there is no exact analogy to Kuhn's model of an exemplar – Newton's Second Law of Motion – in the humanities and the social sciences. Yet a slightly generalized version of the concept of paradigm may still be productively applied to the various 'turns' mentioned earlier. In the case of the 'linguistic turn', for instance, the dominant paradigm (or model) can be identified as that of language. Very roughly

speaking, the linguistic turn conceptualized phenomena as diverse as culture and the unconscious in terms of a semiotic system, starting from the basic assumption that there is no outside of the text. If everything is structured like a language, then the concept of language – and the many tools developed to analyse it – may explain everything. It was on the basis of this premise that the concept of discourse boomed. After Said had invoked (rather than explained) 'Michel Foucault's notion of a discourse' (Said, 1995: 3)[7] in his definition of Orientalism in 1978, many critics of the 1980s further extended the meaning of 'discourse' by applying it to colonialism at large.[8] In 1991 two anthologies of essays juxtaposing 'colonial discourse' and 'post(-)colonial theory' in their titles appeared,[9] thus indicating that colonial discourse (rather than colonial literature, colonial ideology, or colonialism *tout court*) had become the principal object of the newly institutionalized discipline of postcolonial studies. It is certainly no coincidence that in the wake of the linguistic turn, Foucault and Said were made into precursors of a theory of colonial discourse as 'an ensemble of *linguistically-based practices* unified by their common deployment in the management of colonial relationships' (Hulme, 1986: 2; emphasis added).

According to Kuhn's theory, the impact of paradigm shifts is not limited to the community of scientists sharing the same paradigm, however. The Copernican Revolution, for example, affected religion, philosophy and social theory as much as it did astronomy, the discipline in which it had originally developed. Literally an epoch-making event, it was a crucial factor in the transition from medieval to modern society, changing the world view at large (Kuhn, 1966: 2). The same is true for the epistemological breaks investigated by Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things*, a study apparently unconnected to Kuhn's book, though strikingly similar in emphasis.[10] Unlike Kuhn, Foucault refers to the human, and not the natural, sciences, but he also argues against the writing of the history of knowledge in terms of linear progression. However, there is a decisive difference in the way Kuhn and Foucault conceptualize discontinuity: While Kuhn's 'paradigm shifts' occur in single scientific communities and only later affect other fields, Foucault's epistemological breaks are transdisciplinary shifts.[11] '[T]wo things struck me', Foucault writes in his foreword to the English edition of *The Order of Things*, 'the suddenness and thoroughness with which certain sciences were sometimes reorganized; and the fact that at the same time similar changes occurred in apparently very different disciplines' (Foucault, 1994b: xii). Foucault is even more emphatic than Kuhn about the broader cultural impact of such epistemological shifts. He repeatedly interrupts his argument to contemplate 'the fact that within the space of a few years a culture sometimes ceases to think as it had been thinking up till then and begins to think other things in a new way' (Foucault, 1994b: 50, see also 217–221) – seemingly implying that before and after each epistemological break, all members of a culture 'think the same things in the same way', which shows the danger of homogenization inherent to the archaeological method.

If the word 'turn' was ever meant to signify such far-reaching ruptures, it has by now lost much of its original emphasis. Because the humanities and the social sciences of the postmodern era are characterized by methodological pluralism and theoretical syncretism, it is strictly impossible to identify all-comprehensive paradigms or epistemes shared by every 'scientific community', let alone whole 'cultures'. 'Turns', in this context, are rather to be understood as processes of differentiation and specialization, as (gradual) shifts in critical perspective and attention. As such, they are

signs of the ongoing reorientation of the disciplines concerned, in the course of which each newly emerging paradigm supplements and coexists with its predecessors rather than entirely superseding and replacing them. All recent shifts are in one way or another indebted to preceding ones, most notably to the cultural turn (which itself built on the linguistic turn), as Doris Bachmann-Medick (2006: 7–57) has convincingly argued. It should also be noted that declarations of 'turns' are calls to action more than statements of fact. They have a performative character. Once the turn is under way, it functions as an act of empowerment through which a particular discipline – often a formally marginalized one like anthropology in the case of the 'cultural turn' or geography in the case of the 'spatial turn' – is brought to the centre of transdisciplinary attention, acquiring new authority and importance by lending its expertise to the neighbouring disciplines. The enduring legacy of the 'linguistic turn' – the strong presence of literary-theoretical approaches, concepts, and terms in other fields today – impressively illustrates this phenomenon.

III

The 'spatial turn' is one of the most recently proclaimed turns within the human and social sciences. Far from being a unified movement or even school, the thematic and methodological reorientation so described consists of a variety of often diverse approaches. At its most basic, the phrase 'spatial turn' refers to 'an increased attention to the spatial side of the historical world', as German historian Karl Schlögel put it (see Schlögel, 2003: 68; my translation). Writing from the perspective of his own discipline, Schlögel characterizes the spatial turn as an attempt to end the one-sided historicist emphasis on time and to investigate how history literally *takes place* – how space and time are inextricably linked. The by now dominant current of the spatial turn, however, does not content itself with assessing the 'amalgamation of the spatial-temporal dimension' (Schlögel, 2003: 69; my translation) emphasized by Schlögel. Instead of investigating the ways in which concrete places shape history, it raises the converse question of how space is 'produced' in the course of history. This second strain of spatial criticism can be described as a social constructivist reconceptualization of the category of 'space' itself. It was mainly initiated by the French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre, whose 1974 study *The Production of Space* aimed to liberate space from both its common status as a pre-existing given and its passive role as a mere backdrop for social action (the traditional understanding of space still salient in Schlögel's study). Lefebvre concluded his philosophical, sociological, and historical tour de force with the observation that '[space] has now become something more than the theatre, the disinterested stage or setting, of action . . . its role is less and less neutral, more and more active, both as instrument and as goal, as means and as end' (Lefebvre, 1991: 410–411).

Unsurprisingly, the spatial turn was mainly forged by geographers, most notably Edward Soja, the author of what is arguably the first programmatic call for a spatial turn, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, which appeared in 1989.[12] Like Schlögel – who is strongly indebted to his work – Soja begins with a critique of the prevailing hegemony of historicism. Drawing on Lefebvre, he argues in favour of a 'flexible and balanced critical theory that

re-entwines the making of history with the social production of space, with the construction and configuration of human geographies' (Soja, 1989: 11) – a point reinforced in the follow-up study *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (published in 1996). The title of this latter study indicates that Soja's more recent work also draws on literary theorists such as Homi Bhabha to support his thesis about the 'reassertion of space', which is perhaps symptomatic, for literary studies have indeed much to offer to the emerging field of spatial criticism. This point was first made by Michel Foucault when he referred to structuralism's penchant for spatial model building as

> the effort to establish, between elements that could have been connected on a temporal axis, an ensemble of relations that makes them appear as juxtaposed, set off against one another, implicated by each other – that makes them appear, in short, as a sort of configuration.
>
> (Foucault, 1986: 22).

After the publication of *The Order of Things* in 1966, Foucault had been invited by the Paris-based *Cercle d'études architecturales* to 'do a study of space' (Foucault, 1991b: 252), as he would later succinctly put it. Foucault delivered his lecture in May 1967, but it took another 17 years until his manuscript saw publication. The unrevised lecture notes appeared in 1984 under the title 'Des espaces autres'; an English translation followed two years later. Although an editorial footnote attached to the title emphasized that Foucault's lecture was 'not part of the official corpus of his work' (Foucault, 1986: 22, note 1), the short essay – virtually unknown for nearly 20 years – has in the meantime become one of the author's most frequently cited and anthologized texts. The remarkable reception history of Foucault's piece is clearly related to the growing interest in the topic of space over the last two decades. As a matter of fact, 'Of Other Spaces' can with justice be called a founding text of the spatial turn. This is not without irony, considering that Foucault would probably not have written the text if he had not been requested to do so by a group of architects. Although Foucault's work either explores actual spaces (most notably, asylums, clinics, and prisons) or employs spatial concepts and metaphors (as in his theory of discursive formations), he himself never laid out an extended social theory of space of the kind offered by Henri Lefebvre. 'Of Other Spaces' remained the author's only published text directly addressing the topic, with the exception of two later interviews conducted by geographers and anthropologists,[13] who encouraged – not to say urged – Foucault to elaborate further upon the spatial aspects of his theory of power. Opening his paper at the *Cercle d'études architecturales*, Foucault notes:

> The great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history. . . . The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: We are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.
>
> (Foucault, 1986: 22)

From an early 21st-century perspective, it is difficult not to be impressed by the seemingly prophetic character of Foucault's words. These lines, it has to be remembered, were written before the World Wide Web and the discourse of globalization had made 'network' one of the most commonly used tropes for the current global constellation. Tempting as Foucault's clear delineation of an 'epoch of space' may be, however, it also has its problems, which are related to the method Foucault employed at the time he wrote the paper. Proponents of the spatial turn who refer to this well-known passage – such as, most prominently, the aforementioned Edward Soja – tend to ignore the close relationship between Foucault's lecture and the monograph that immediately preceded it. As in his magnum opus *The Order of Things*, published one year previously, Foucault makes a neat distinction here between opposing historical epochs or, more precisely, between their dominant epistemes. Foucault's argument can be paraphrased as follows: Whereas before 1900 things were primarily perceived in terms of their temporal relationship, we tend to focus nowadays more on their relationship in space; the concept of *continuity* has become increasingly superseded by that of *contiguity*. Once again, Foucault seems to establish a clear-cut boundary between two historical periods. Yet upon closer examination, his dating of the transition from continuity to contiguity proves to be quite ambiguous: Foucault leaves it open as to whether the said change occurred at the turn of the 20th century (as the schematic opposition between 'the 19th century' and our own 'epoch' suggests) or whether it happened more recently, at the historical moment when Foucault composed his lecture, that is, in the late 1960s. Both readings are possible, though the fact that Foucault refers to structuralism to illustrate his point strongly suggests that the spatialization of thought is a more recent phenomenon – a turn-in-progress that cannot yet be dated with precision.

IV

In his influential discussion of the passage, Edward Soja interprets Foucault as saying that the twentieth century as a whole is characterized by a new sensibility of spatiality, only to contradict this diagnosis. He asserts that,

> The nineteenth-century obsession with history did not die in the *fin de siècle*. Nor has it been fully replaced by a spatialization of thought and experience. An essentially historical epistemology continues to pervade the critical consciousness of modern social theory.
>
> (Soja, 1989: 10)

Foucault's 'epoch of space', Soja contends, only dawned in the 1980s, when a 'distinctively postmodern and critical human geography' (Soja, 1989: 11) was beginning to take shape – a geography of the very type represented by his own book, that is. Although Soja thus partly credits himself with the spatial turn, he repeatedly acknowledges his indebtedness to various precursors from outside his discipline, most notably Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault. He comments: 'Only a few particularly vigorous voices resonated through the still hegemonic historicism of the past twenty years to pioneer the development of postmodern geography' (Soja, 1989: 16).

To identify Foucault as one of these voices is not uncontroversial, however. For, as was said earlier, Foucault never fully developed his social theory of space, and the fact that geography is only a latent presence in much of his work could also be taken to prove the opposite of what Soja claims. In any case, Soja's choice of Foucault as a predecessor of the spatial turn is evidently less motivated by the content of his major monographs – Soja mainly cites the paper 'Of Other Spaces' and the two interviews briefly referred to in the previous section – than by the status which Foucault had gained in the course of other turns. When an authoritative voice like Foucault's emphasizes the relevance of space in the present age, the need for a spatial turn can be made even more plausible, all the more because Foucault does not speak as a geographer but as a cultural historian. And as Soja points out, Foucault himself stated in a 1976 interview that geography had 'acted as the support, the condition of possibility for the passage between a series of factors I tried to relate' (Foucault, 1980: 77), although this was mentioned only after the editors of the geographical journal *Hérodote* had expressed their surprise at his 'silence about geography' (Foucault, 1980: 63).[14]

Foucault also plays a crucial part in Derek Gregory's study *Geographical Imaginations* of 1994, the title of which pays tribute to another potential predecessor of the spatial turn, Edward Said.[15] Said, Gregory writes in a long article dedicated to the author, is 'one of those rare critics for whom a geographical imagination is indispensable' (Gregory, 1995b: 447). As with Foucault, Said's reflections about space constitute fragments widely dispersed throughout his work rather than one consistent theory. Yet Said too was among the few cultural theorists who emphasized the relevance of geography long before the topic of space had become fashionable. In the opening pages of *Culture and Imperialism*, he observes: 'Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography' (Said, 1993: 7). As this and other passages show, Said can be counted among those theorists whom Foucault characterized as the 'determined inhabitants of space' (Foucault, 1986: 22).

There is another connection between Foucault and Said which few critics seem to be aware of even today: The fact that parts of Said's critique of Orientalism were anticipated by Foucault in the preface to his first major work, *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, translated in abridged form as *Madness and Civilization*. The relevant section from Foucault's preface – which only appears in the original French 1961 edition of his study and is missing in the English translation – calls attention to the 'obscure gestures, necessarily forgotten once they are accomplished' (Foucault, 1994a: 161; my translation) by which a culture rejects something which later comes to represent its other/exterior. Such rejections, Foucault argues, are at the origin of all cultural history: 'To interrogate a culture about its border-experiences (*expériences-limites*) means to question it, on the confines of history, about a rift that is like the very birth of its history' (Foucault, 1994a: 161; my translation). In order to understand the emergence of the Enlightenment culture of reason, Foucault explains, historians of knowledge need to write the 'history of the limits' (Foucault, 1994a: 161; my translation) which demarcate that culture; they also need to explore what lies beyond these limits, namely the domains of dream, madness, sexuality and the Orient (Foucault, 1994a: 161–162). It does not become clear from Foucault's preface whether these four examples are supposed to cover all varieties of the 'other' of reason. What is certain is that Foucault himself only dealt with the first three varieties,

in his early introduction to Binswanger's *Le rêve et l' existence* (1954), in his published dissertation *Folie et déraison* (1961), as well as in his late, unfinished series *Histoire de la sexualité* (1976–84). As Gregory notes, 'Foucault's own engagements with the Orient were always marginal notations' (Gregory, 1995b: 457), but he nevertheless provided an outline of what a Foucauldian study of the Western relationship to the Orient could have looked like. This passage from Foucault's preface has been translated by Gregory in his essay on 'Imaginative Geographies':

> In the universality of western *ratio* [reason], there is that divide which is the Orient: The Orient, thought of as the origin, dreamed of as the vertiginous point from which come nostalgic yearnings and promises of return, the Orient offered to the colonizing reason of the west, yet indefinitely inaccessible for it always remains the outer limit: Night of the beginning, in which the west takes form but in which it has inscribed a line of division, the Orient is for the west everything which the west is not, even though it must search there for its original truth. It is necessary to create the history of this great divide throughout the formation of the west, to follow its continuity and its exchanges, but also to let the tragic liturgy of its simplified inscriptions become visible.[16]
>
> (Foucault, quoted and translated in Gregory, 1995b: 457)

From both a thematic and methodological perspective, Said's *Orientalism* can be read as the very history outlined here by Foucault.[17] The parallel becomes particularly obvious in Said's summary of the crucial first part of his study, where he writes:

> The boundary notion of East and West, the varying degrees of projected inferiority and strength, . . . the kinds of characteristics ascribed to the Orient: All these testify to a willed imaginative and geographic division made between East and West, and lived through many centuries.
>
> (Said, 1995: 201)

In passages like this one, Said seems to echo explicitly Foucault's image of the 'great divide', even though *Madness and Civilization* is neither mentioned nor referenced in his study, in contrast to both *Archaeology of Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish*. More problematically, the quoted passage also seems to suggest that Said accepts the Occident as a geographical and cultural given – a secure vantage point from which all other geographical-cultural entities could be imagined. Similar to Foucault, however, Said does not content himself with describing the East as a projection screen for various images of the culturally and ethnically 'other'. Instead he goes on to assert that 'as both geographical and cultural entities – to say nothing of historical entities – such locales, regions, geographical sectors as ''Orient'' *and* ''Occident'' are man-made' (Said, 1995: 5; emphasis added), a point that is repeatedly reiterated throughout his book. As Said emphasizes, the Occident did not predate the Orient; both (pseudo-)entities emerged simultaneously in Western discourse, through the drawing of a discursive boundary.

Despite these parallels between Foucault and Said, it would be misleading to reduce *Orientalism* merely to its Foucauldian influences. For while Said uses the same kind of constructivist epistemology that Foucault employed in his thesis about the constitution – and exclusion – of 'madness' in the Classical period, Said goes beyond a

mere exploration of the 'limits' in so far as he extends the metaphor of the discursive boundary. In this respect, Said's study is actually closer to Gaston Bachelard's 1958 book on *The Poetics of Space* – a reading of spatial motifs in poetry, combining a phenomenological and a psychoanalytical approach – than to Foucault (whose lecture on 'other spaces' incidentally is also indebted to Bachelard[18]). Said explicitly refers to Bachelard's chapter on the crucial distinction between the spaces inside and outside of the house, a distinction that is based much more on what we imaginatively endow these spaces with than what they 'objectively' are. The same is true, Said argues, for 'imaginative geography of the ''our land – barbarian land'' variety' (Said, 1995: 54) which can be traced back to Greek antiquity. In this context, Said describes imaginative geography as the 'universal practice of designating in one's mind a familiar space which is ''ours'' and an unfamiliar space beyond ''ours'' which is ''theirs''' (Said, 1995: 54). This practice, he goes on to add, 'help[s] the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away' (Said, 1995: 55). Imaginative geography, then, is a strategy of identity construction which equates (spatial) *distance* with (cultural, ethnic, social) *difference*, associating the non-spatial characteristics of 'self' and 'other' with particular places. The 'great divide' between West and East as both geographical and cultural entities is just one example of this strategy – a strategy that works on the level of both the individual and the collective.

Foucault and Said are not the first theorists to have emphasized the relevance of spatial demarcations for the process of identity construction, but it is their concepts – rather than those of other, lesser known authors – which have travelled across the boundaries of disciplines. As I have argued elsewhere, Said's rather sketchy characterization of imaginative geography shows striking analogies to a 1903 essay by Georg Simmel (only recently translated into English and probably unknown to Said) on the 'Sociology of Space' (Frank, 2005: 162–75). In this essay, Simmel not only argued that 'space in general is only an activity of the mind' (Simmel, 1997: 138), but also observed: 'It is not the form of spatial proximity or distance that creates the special phenomena of neighbourliness or foreignness. . . . Rather, these . . . are facts caused purely by psychological *content*' (Simmel, 1997: 137–138; emphasis in original). Simmel's main point is that social groups always think of the space that they occupy as a unity, framed in by boundaries, even when no 'natural' borders (such as mountains, rivers, deserts, or the sea) are present. In order to be able to develop a collective identity, Simmel argues, every community needs to have a notion of the space which it, and it alone, occupies; for only by delineating, or collectively imagining, such a common space can it constitute itself as a unity. Similar arguments can be found in texts by the Russian cultural semiotician Yuri Lotman, who, in his works from the late 1960s to the early 1990s, repeatedly stressed the decisive role of boundaries for the construction of cultural identity. Lotman writes, in words that are highly reminiscent of Said: 'Every culture begins by dividing the world into ''its own'' internal space and ''their'' external space' (Lotman, 1990: 131). The fact that it is the Foucault-via-Said tradition of spatial criticism and not any alternative approach which geographers now use as a starting point for the spatial turn indicates how much the travel of theory is determined by what Said termed the 'conditions of acceptance': Concepts set forth by authors who are heard across the disciplines are more likely to be 'accepted', whereas others remain marginal.

For Derek Gregory, the parallel between Foucault and Said goes beyond the fact that they both 'invoke spatiality' (Gregory, 1995a: 30); the two authors also move the focus from the text to the physical experience of space. Their respective approaches, Gregory is convinced, enable the historical geographer to

> [m]ove critical discussion of Orientalism beyond the library, to disrupt the usual distinctions between the text and the world, and recover the ways in which the physical passage of European travellers through other landscapes and other cultures marked the very process of their writing and their representation of those spaces.
>
> (Gregory, 1995a: 30)

For Gregory, then, not everything in Orientalism is discourse; the geographical construction of the Orient as the 'East' is rooted in (discursively informed) spatial experience – a reading diametrically opposed to the uses of Foucault and Said in the context of the linguistic turn. In response to this reading, Soja also added Said to his list of precursors of the spatial turn in 1996, albeit for different reasons. Soja's study *Thirdspace* is less concerned with a critical history of geography (and the way it contributed to the creation of spatial imaginaries in the context of modern colonialism) than with a description of postmodern spatiality. It seeks to develop an understanding of space – or rather, of the interplay between 'historicality', 'sociality', and 'spatiality' (Soja, 1996: 71) – that is appropriate for our present period. And, as Soja maintains, both Foucault and Said made first moves into this direction (Soja, 1996: 136–9, 145–63). They also prepared the ground for a reconciliation between materialist and constructivist approaches to space by prefiguring Soja's own concept of 'real-and-imagined places'. In his 1995 afterword to *Orientalism*, Said observes that 'such geographical designations [as ''Orient'' and ''Occident''] are an odd combination of the empirical and imaginative' (Said, 1995: 331). In apparent contradiction to his earlier definition of imaginative geographies, which states that such 'geographical distinctions *can* be entirely arbitrary' (Said, 1995: 54; emphasis in original), Said implies here that there are physical constraints to the spatial construction of alterity. As he revealingly notes at the very beginning of his study, '[t]he Orient was almost a European invention' (Said, 1995: 1) – almost, but not entirely. The imaginative geography of the 'Orient' was superimposed onto real space, but it could not make this real space disappear (to bury it in discourse, as it were). Accordingly, imaginative geographies can be defined, using Soja, as 'dominating conventional representations of space as well as material spatial practices' (Soja, 1996: 137), that is, imaginative projections onto real space as well as material interventions into that space.

V

When Soja and Gregory reassessed (and reinvented) Foucault and Said as pioneering spatial thinkers in the first half of the 1990s, *Orientalism* was still best known for its use and development of the Foucauldian concept of 'discourse', although Said's methodology had by then been the subject of much criticism. If Said had pioneered

anything, most critics seemed to agree, then it was the discourse-analytical approach to the nexus between power and knowledge which ties literature to imperialism. Although this reading is corroborated by many crucial passages of Said's study, it is nonetheless selective. It exemplifies the phenomenon which I outlined at the outset of this essay: Theories do not usually travel in their entirety; in the context of each 'turn', they are reduced to those concepts which can best be adapted to the theoretical needs of the moment and which are accordingly overemphasized, while others remain underemphasized, if not altogether neglected. The spatial turn does not represent a progress over the linguistic turn and its numerous 'sub-turns' (at least not in any teleological sense); nor does it offer us a more accurate and complete picture of either Foucault or Said. But it does direct our attention to those aspects of their theories that had previously not been in our field of vision. Said's book now appears to be, first and foremost, an exploration of what may be termed the spatialization of difference and the geographical imaginary of the West. Accordingly, while some concepts from Said's study have ceased to travel, others are currently very active. And *Orientalism* will certainly produce more travelling concepts in the future, in the context of turns to come – when other 'conditions of acceptance' and other 'resistances' come into play, as Said himself notes in his essay 'Traveling Theory'.

Notes

1 Bal herself seems to be unaware that her above-quoted notion of travelling concepts closely resembles the following passage from Said's 1982 essay: 'Like people and schools of criticism, ideas and theories travel – from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another' (Said, 1983: 226). In any case, she does not reference Said's paper.

2 Said's concrete example is the transfer of Hungarian Georg Lukàcs's Marxist theory of reification first to the Paris of Lucien Goldmann and then to the England of Raymond Williams (or, to put it in temporal terms: From post-First World War East to post-Second World War West). Summarizing the discrepancies between Lukàcs's *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) and Goldmann's *Le dieu caché* (1959) – 'insurrectionary consciousness' on the one hand, 'tragic vision' on the other – Said emphasizes the 'extent to which theory is a response to a specific social and historical situation of which an intellectual occasion is a part' (Said, 1983: 237). In so doing, he does not wish to argue that the differences between Lukàcs's Budapest and Goldmann's Paris can solely explain the evolution of Lukàcsian Marxism. What this example suggests is merely 'that ''Budapest'' and ''Paris'' are irreducibly first conditions, and they provide limits and apply pressures to which each writer, given his own gifts, predilections, and interests, responds' (Said, 1983: 237).

3 In this much-cited essay Clifford argues against the static concept of the 'field' that still informs much ethnographical writing. Any account of 'culture', he insists, should do justice to the fact that cultures travel, adjusting its 'representational strategies' accordingly.

4 See also Clifford (1997: 31–9).

5 In *Travelling Concepts*, Bal describes concepts as 'shorthand theories' (2002: 23).

6 See, for example, Jameson, 1998.

7 For a critical discussion of Said's use of the Foucauldian concept of discourse see Frank (2004).

8 For the sake of brevity, I will only mention two particularly influential essays of the early and mid-1980s, both of which argue that the principal purpose of 'colonial discourse' is to legitimize colonial expansion and rule: Bhabha (1983: 198) and JanMohamed (1986: 81).

9 These anthologies are: Williams and Chrisman (1994); and Barker, Hulme and Iversen (1994).

10 As far as I see, Jean Piaget was the first to have pointed this out in his study *Le structuralisme* of 1968 (Piaget, 1971: 132).

11 There is another crucial fact that distinguishes Foucault's approach from Kuhn's: Unlike Kuhn, Foucault does not credit paradigm shifts to revolutionary thinkers like Copernicus, Newton, or Einstein, explicitly refusing to take into consideration factors external to the discourses analysed and eluding the 'problem of causality' (Foucault, 1994b: xii). As is well known, however, Foucault would later attribute Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud with the status of 'founders of discursivity' (Foucault, 1991a: 114).

12 Soja seems to be the first to have used the phrase 'spatial turn,' though rather inconspicuously, in his study *Postmodern Geographies* (see Soja, 1989: 16, 17, 50, 154). As Jörg Döring and Tristan Thielmann have pointed out in their instructive account of the spatial turn, Fredric Jameson used the same phrase – for entirely different purposes – two years later, explaining that '[a] certain spatial turn has often seemed to offer one of the more productive ways of distinguishing postmodernism from modernism proper' (Döring and Thielmann, 2008: 8).

13 These interviews are the already quoted 'Space, Knowledge, and Power' of 1982 (Foucault, 1991b) as well as Foucault (1980).

14 The question of geography's contribution to Foucault's thinking – and vice versa – was recently taken up in an anthology of essays, which also collects further minor writings by Foucault on the topic of space (see Elden and Crampton, 2007).

15 See especially the section 'Imaginative Geographies and Geographical Imaginations', in which Gregory explicitly derives the concept in the title of his book from Said's 'imaginative geographies'. (Gregory, 1994: 203ff.).

16 In the French original the passage reads: 'Dans l'universalité de la *ratio* occidentale, il ya ce partage qu'est l'Orient: l'Orient, pensé comme l'origine, rêvé comme le point vertigineux d'où naissent les nostalgies et les promesses de retour, l'Orient offert à la raison colonisatrice de l'Occident, mais indéfiniment inaccessible, car il demeure toujours la limite: nuit du commencement, en quoi l'Occident s'est formé, mais dans laquelle il a tracé une ligne de partage, l'Orient est pour lui tout ce qu'il n'est pas, encore qu'il doive y chercher ce qu'est sa vérité primitive. Il faudra faire une histoire de ce grand partage, tout au long du devenir occidental, le suivre dans sa continuité et ses échanges, mais le laisser aussi apparaître dans son hiératisme tragique' (Foucault, 1994a: 161–162).

17 As Gregory observed in 1995, '*Orientalism* can, I think, be read as Said's attempt to reconstruct the missing history of Foucault's ''great divide'' between Occident and Orient' (Gregory, 1995b: 457).

18 See the reference to 'Bachelard's monumental work' in Foucault (1986: 23).

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